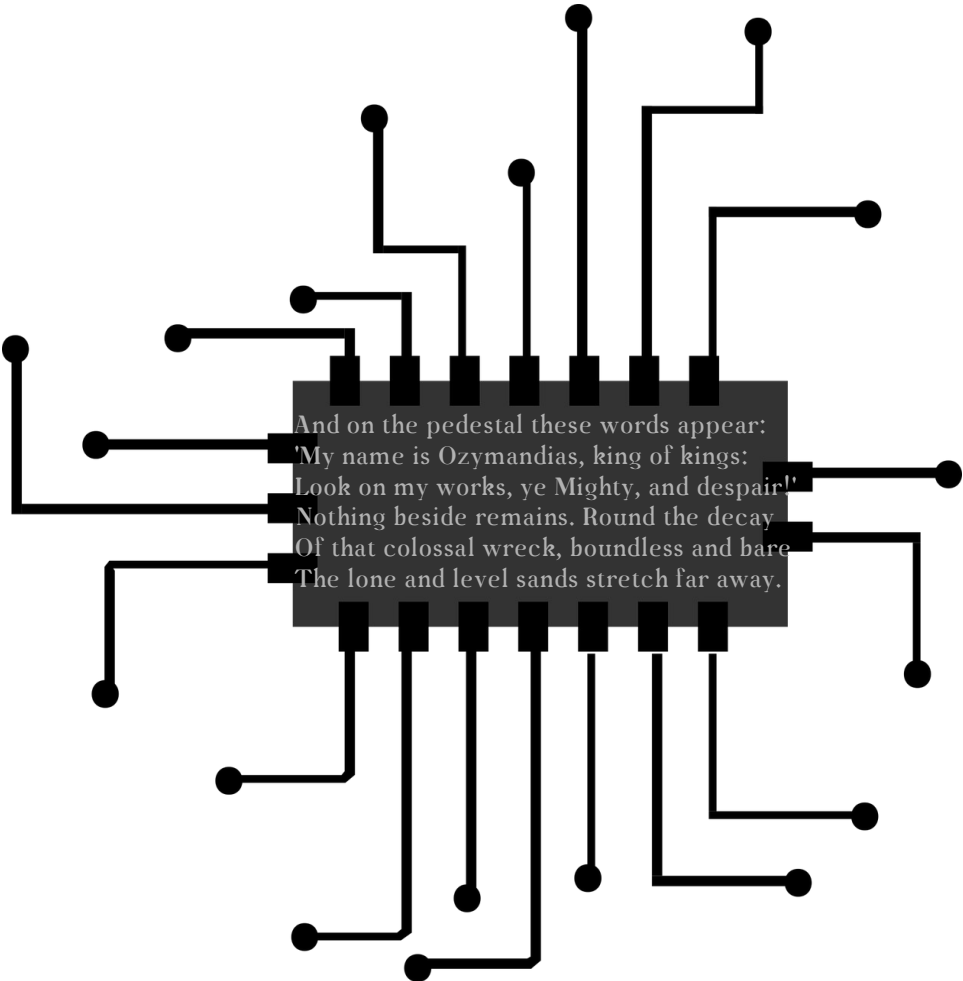


How Do We Know?

A Few Notes on Reclaiming Knowledge for Life



And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'

by Olchar E. Lindsann

mOnocle-Lash Anti-Press

Knowledge, Information, Experience, Community

As information becomes dematerialized – soon we will no longer own our own copies of music, films, programmes, or many texts (including those we create), but rather rent them, like Feudal serfs, from a supposedly-dematerialized information-bank appropriately euphemized as the *Cloud*.¹ Capital has followed it, dematerializing into the abstract world of finance, pure capitalism, wherein all use-value has been obliterated and exchange value alone exists uninhibited, as if within some endless cloud. Abstraction, alienation, which has always been the basis of capitalist power, is congealing exponentially, and the no-space of *information* (not *knowledge*, which is use-value) has become the space of Power.

The effects have been clearly marked in the fracturing of local, terrestrial communities; in the desensitization to the monstrosities of world affairs, the proliferating proxy-wars waged by client tribes and states of all the major powers, the vacuum of empathy which, while nothing new, finds less and less excuse everyday as these atrocities become ever more widely reported – spread as information, as carriers of capital, nothing more. This movement benefits capital by creating a new fantasy-world which it can colonise, at the expense of the *real* beings who – raised from birth in an inverted world where *alienation has become the very sign of Value itself* – no longer value, as such, anything that actually touches them. Value can be found only in your distance from it. We are asked to embrace the Spectacle *as such*; we are being weaned away from living.

There is no lack of information needed to break away, and even the glutting of *fake news*, which is simply the most recent iteration of the *fake thought* which has always fed every counter-revolution, cannot

1 This is, in actuality, a series of gigantic, high-tech complexes in the Western US, housing millions of dollars' worth of equipment produced by slave-labour, consuming vast resources in order to keep thousands of computer units continually cooled.

entirely hide that information. What we lack – and what the destruction of public education over the last thirty years has been designed to destroy – is the communal capacity for *thought* – i.e., converting information into knowledge, into use-value, and thus into *action*; even the simple and humble action of living ethically. Dissenting communities need not only to construct new social structures for the interchange of knowledge, but even more fundamentally must develop ways to *embody* the transfer of knowledge, entangling it entirely with our collective and personal lives, friendships, psychologies, daily habits, and ways of speaking and thinking. We must think about the *situation* of knowledge, in the full Situationist sense. As mainstream society becomes increasingly unsituated, what is now a defensive measure against total alienation will increasingly become a valuable *weapon* – its need will be felt even more urgently, and its logic will become more unfamiliar, unexpected and unpredictable by power. It will also resist, at least to a greater extent than digital and institutional information, the tightening grip of the most invasive surveillance states the world has ever known: The United States and the United Kingdom (United we stand – we just May Trump ‘em).

Our situation is unique and terrifying; but there are models we can find and adapt. In the early 19th Century, the explosion of industrialism, uprooting of rural lifestyles with the closure of the Commons, the spread of literacy to produce a mass market unimaginable a generation or two earlier, and the ascendancy of the Capitalist class to power in European nations (including the US, let’s be real) between 1770 and 1830 coupled with the authoritarian backlash against the centuries many armed democratic uprisings, all contributed to a situation that parallels ours in many respects: new technologies offering great liberatory promise, but bent to the will of capitalist oligarchs instead; massive uprooting of society, both its populations and its lifestyles and values; fundamental economic shifts and the systematization of a colonial-global market setting the various exploited classes of the globe against each other; a new, volatile, media-driven mass culture which

allowed for forms and content of expression never possible before, but – created and marketed by corporate interests, and disseminated in standardized, impersonally-produced commodities – did so at the cost of an increasingly alienated and compromised situation; the feeling of standing on the verge of a new and potentially horrific new era, with all the tools required to construct a better one. Here are three responses to the situation (or the spectacle) that we face, drawn from my research and thinking into that past, ripe to be radicalized through our re-invention. None have ever been absent from our communities; they are in our communal DNA, as it were. But it is time that we became more conscious of them, think more deeply and strategically about how they could be recreated and deployed more radically. They need to become a dominant gene.

Apprenticeship

The very fact that the apprenticeship model was killed off by the division of labour, the most perfect instrument of alienation, is enough to make us suspect its value. The formal apprenticeship of the pre-Modern age was firmly embedded in the economic power structures of its time, with motives of mastery, not liberation; but if we dissociate it from the spectre of professionalism and advancement, what emerges is a form of learning which interpenetrates alternative forms of family, of friendship, of collaboration, of many other parts of life. The education is individual; “teacher” and “student” drawn together by an affinity, by shared goals calling for related methods; nothing standard nor arbitrary nor abstract. Nor is this relationship permanent or definitive; the apprentice will become equal in craft, and is already humanly equal. The apprentice learns not through alienated instruction, but through collaboration; it is thus contiguous with friendship, and more often than not there is no

formal recognition of apprenticeship, no hierarchy – simply a pattern of interaction that tends to enrich the understanding of the young or inexperienced. We are all apprentices of each other in one or another skill or discipline; how much more effectively if we approach it with greater focus? Apprenticeship is focused on learning to *do*, not learning to *have* knowledge – on use-value, not exchange-value. Within the avant-garde, there are chains of personal mentorship that can be traced from the years of Napoleon's regime to at least the second half of the 20th Century. Similar, more formalized chains exist within orchestral virtuoso training. The classical Greek Philosophical schools provide another model, though the Sophistical schools, with their anarchic approach to discourse, are probably better. DIY Shadow Schools and educational co-ops already work on an understanding of these dynamics.

Bibliography

When I speak of the *embodiment* of knowledge, I am not using *embodiment* as a dis-embodied metaphor. *We must save books*. Not texts (which can be reduced to mere information), but physical books. We must reclaim reading, thinking, and discussing as *physical* acts, and this begins with the physical book. I learn within real life, in this chair, with this object in my hands, and when I remember this information I remember the situation, the object with carries within it so many other situations, both my own and others'. As surveillance becomes yet more invasive, as all of our media is drawn into the megalithic Cloud, *print* will take on an increasingly subversive quality; it is, like all embodied knowledge, less visible to digitized power. With the inevitable disappearance of net neutrality, private and co-op libraries of zines and other subversive literature in print will become increasingly important. And despite the blithe assertions of so many Positivists, the internet *will not exist forever*.

There is nothing permanent about a system of informational “storage” that depends upon the entire NeoLiberal global economy continuing flawlessly, just as it is now, for ever and ever and ever.¹ Even the self-ingesting internal dynamics of Capitalism itself run counter to this fairytale. No archivist I know expects digitized media to last more than another generation. This offers radical communities a unique opportunity: when the internet falls – an event of even greater significance than the destruction of the Library at Alexandria – *much of official culture will be all but wiped out of existence*. Henceforth, the histories will be written on the basis of what was preserved in print. Underground culture will still constitute only a small percentage of that material, but the odds for each individual book will be infinitely greater than Power currently assumes. We should remember the story of the Nag Hammadi texts – buried in a cave in the desert to escape a purge of all literature opposed to the Catholic Church, they are now available again after 2000 years through freak accidents. No doubt there are hundreds of other secret libraries never found; but such things *do* happen . . .

Such archival libraries, gathering both present and past radical literature, are vital for other reasons too. The *old* book is also a communal relic – a touchstone of the fact that the great project of liberation is greater than ourselves, that it is multi-generational, that we must extend our solidarity to our dead comrades of the past as well as our unborn comrades of future struggles; the book carries with it all the marks – the physical marks – of their *use* of this text in the struggle we now continue. The anarchist bibliographer will not seek pristine, unread books that now bask in the exchange-value of “precious antiques” but scrounge for the tattered, marked-up, well-loved books that have been scarred in the chaos of the battle of *thought*, which an individual, through integration with their lives as lived, has stripped of its standardization and made *alive*.

Storytelling

Having said the above, perhaps, nonetheless, we get *too much* of our information from books. We must find ways to seamlessly blend leisure and learning, informality with rigour, purpose with fun. Storytelling attaches abstract *information* to a particular, shared social *moment*, a situation through which it has become part of their lives. It adapts knowledge to the precise needs of the community and the moment, brings out what is important or inspirational or cautionary *for us*, and introduces a thousand nuances of implication, relation, and subtext that *information* as such rejects and (again, let's think strategically) *cannot understand*. And, it is fun (assuming one's a good storyteller; if not, apprentice yourself to someone who is . . .) It connects a subculture's way of life and communal memory to its history, values, and aspirations. This is the role given to the Epic Poem in most societies, including all of those from which our own has derived; is it not ripe for re-invention, divested of the elements of chauvinism, xenophobia, racism, paternalism and militarism with which those societies imbued it?

The era of digital freedom is drawing toward its close, but the era of digital hegemony is likely just beginning, and the only thing likely (despite all our hopes) to end it is the collapse of the digital order itself, concomitant with economic and infrastructure collapse. If dissenting communities have the foresight and focus to prepare now, our communities will be prepared with the awarenesses and practices needed to act radically, ethically, and humanely amongst whatever wreckage we must collectively navigate.

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